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An unending variety of topics

Wednesday, November 02, 2005

Augustus' solar timekeeper

The University of Oregon is recreating a famous Roman sundial from 10 B.C. which doubled as a clock and calendar. A few decades earlier the Roman comic writer Plautus put into the mouth of an idle character a complaint against shared standards of time and scheduling:

"The gods confound the man who first found out

How to distinguish the hours. Confound him too,

Who in this place set up a sundial,

To cut and hack my days so wretchedly

Into small pieces! When I was a boy,

My belly was my sundial – only surer,

Truer, and more exact than any of them.

This dial told me when 'twas the proper time

To go to dinner, when I ought to eat;

But nowadays, why even when I have,

I can't fall to unless the sun gives leave.

The town's so full of these confounded dials!"

As I described my article "A Measure of Sacrifice," the Romans recognized astronomical time as a measure of sacrifice, but it was the

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About Me

Nick Szabo

"A premier thinker about history, law and economics, and the lessons they have for security." -- Adam Shostack, Emergent Chaos

"Szabo comes out with these essays that leave me in awe." -- Brian Dunbar

"Reading material that is eclectic, challenging and endlessly fascinating." -- Sean McGrath, Propylon

"Like most blogs worth my attention, this blog is updated only infrequently. That is because the authors of blogs worth my attention only post when they have something to say that is true, relevant and not already known by their audience. Most of the human race does not have the skill to know when an idea has these three properties. The skill is particularly rare in the fields of politics and economics, which is why this blog is such a rare and valuable thing." -- Richard Hollerith

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medieval bell and clock makers who gave us our modern sense of precise shared time. Precise and objectively measured time used as measure of sacrifice is one of the patterns of integrity basic to modern civilization. I describe some of the latest research in securely sharing time and determining the order of events on the Internet in "Advances in Distributed Security."

Posted by Nick Szabo at 9:41 AM

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